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# 2020

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Summary of the 2020 Annual Report of the  
**Service Complaints Ombudsman**  
for the Armed Forces

## Message from the Ombudsman

As the new Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces, I am pleased to present a summary of the Annual Report for 2020, covering Nicola Williams' fifth and final year as the Ombudsman.

While there have been a number of improvements to the Service Complaints system, unfortunately, this year finds once more that the system is not yet efficient, effective and fair.

This summary highlights the key information from the report, including the:

- Work undertaken by my office in 2020;
- Work of the Service Complaints system in 2020; and
- Recommendations made in my report.

I hope you find this an interesting and useful document; whether as a companion to the full report or a standalone document.



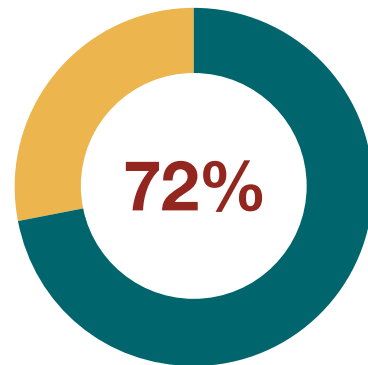
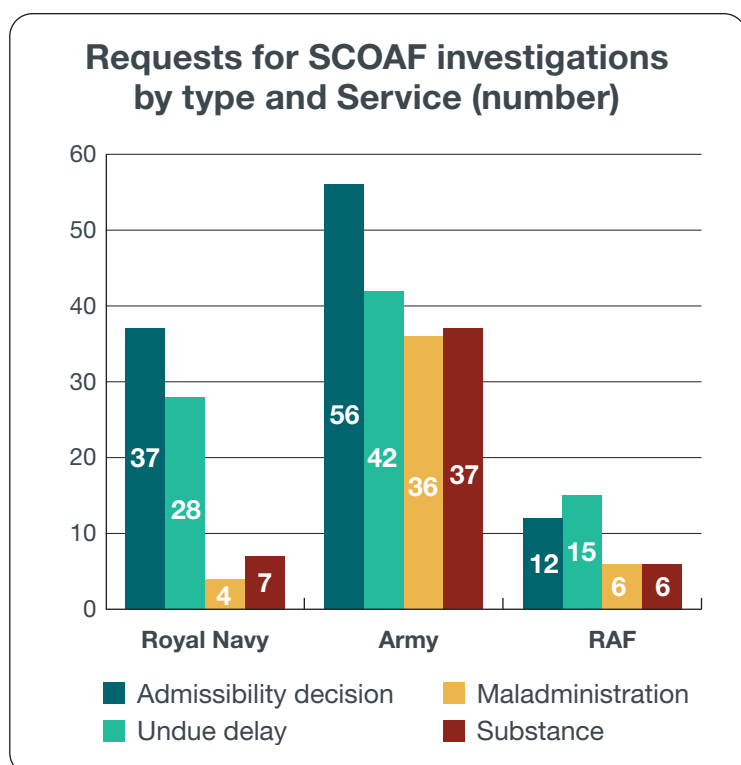
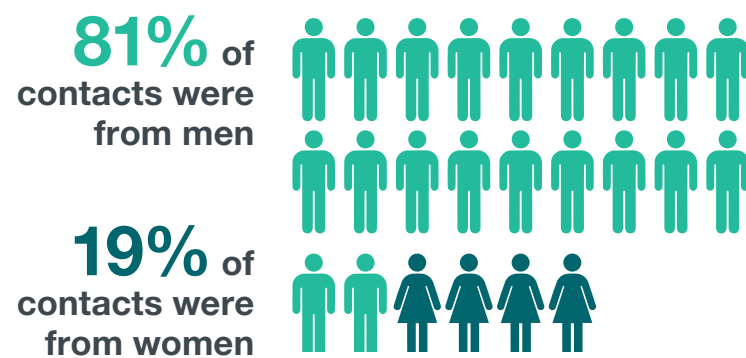
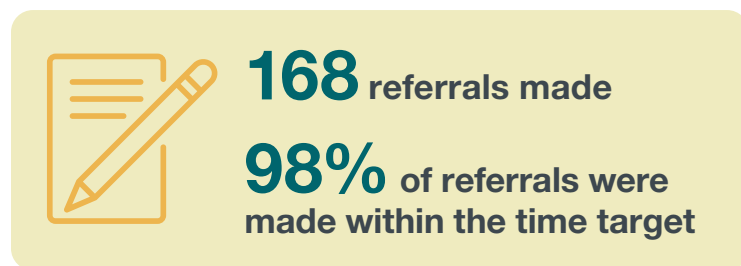
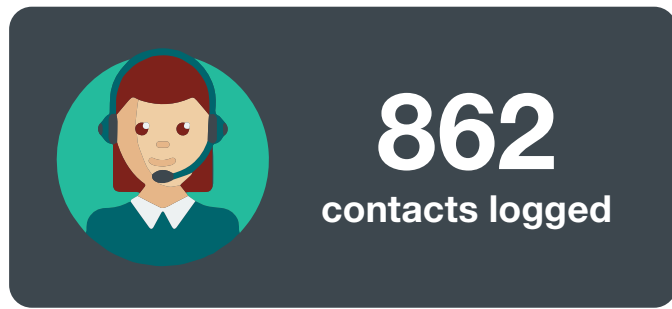
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MH' or similar initials, enclosed in a circular scribble.

**Mariette Hughes**

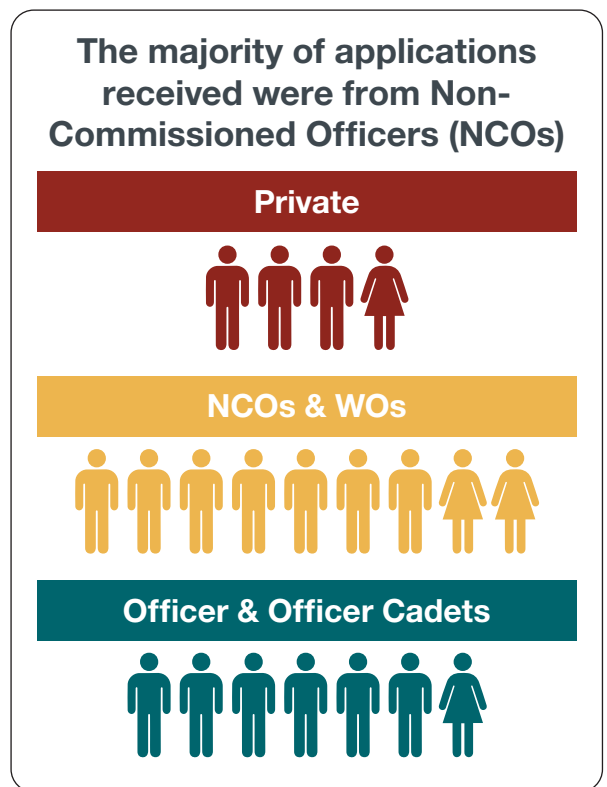
Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces

# The work of SCOAF in 2020

The Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces (SCOAF) provides independent and impartial oversight of the Service Complaints system.




of contacts made concerned issues that fell within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction

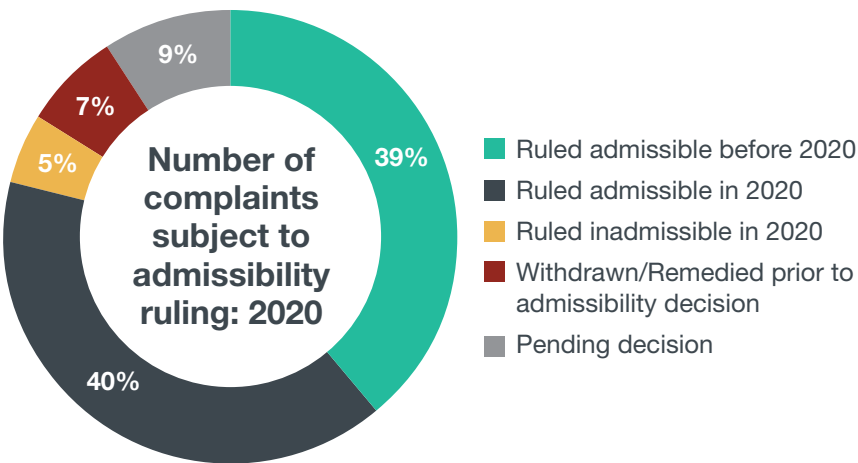


# Service Complaints in 2020

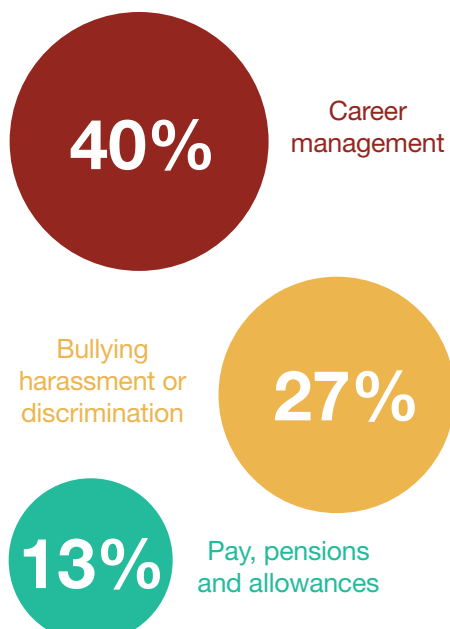
The Service Complaints system is an internal workplace grievance system for members of the Armed Forces in the United Kingdom. The information below reflects the work of this internal process.



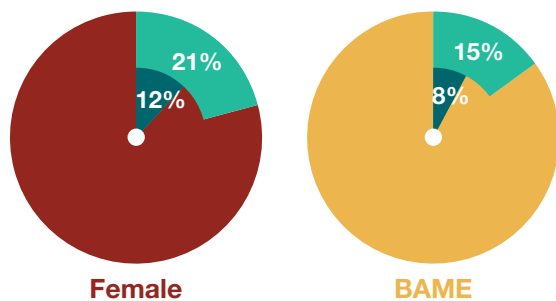
**1,833**  
formal statements of complaint were processed by the Services in 2020



**The top 3 areas Service Complaints were made about in 2020 were:**

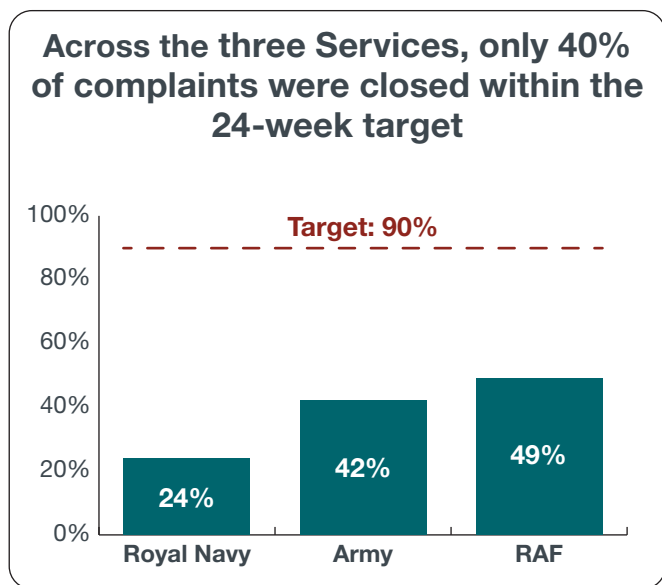
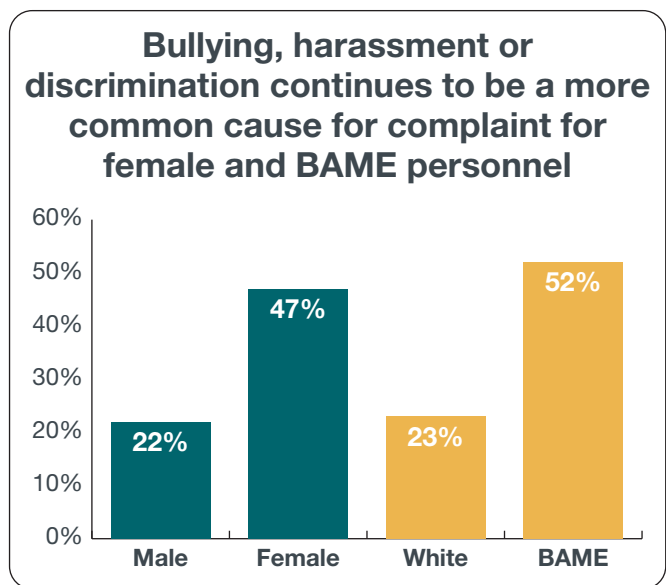


Area	Percentage
Career management	40%
Bullying harassment or discrimination	27%
Pay, pensions and allowances	13%



**Female** Service personnel were overrepresented in the Service Complaints system in 2020: **12%** of personnel, **21%** of admissible complaints.

**BAME** Service personnel were overrepresented in the Service Complaints system in 2020: **8%** of personnel, **15%** of admissible complaints.



**2 pre-2016 complaints** remain open.

## Recommendations

This reporting year, the Ombudsman did not make any further recommendations for improvement to the Service Complaints system. Further detail on why can be found in the Annual Report.

To date, the Ombudsman has made 35 recommendations and 6 observations for improvements to the Service Complaints system as well as to the Ombudsman's office. Some of these recommendations concerned structural changes to policy and processes, analysis and research, and training.

- **2016:** 12 recommendations were made. 8 are completed; 4 are being addressed by the Service Complaints Transformation Team.
- **2017:** 10 recommendations were made. 4 are completed; 2 are in progress; and 4 were not adopted by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) but remain under review.
- **2018:** 9 recommendations were made (2 of which were for SCOAF to implement). 6 are completed; 3 are being addressed by the Service Complaints Transformation Team.
- **2019:** 4 recommendations were made (in addition to 3 observations). 2 are completed; 2 are being addressed by the Service Complaints Transformation Team.
- **2020:** 0 recommendations have been made; 3 observations.

Progress has been made against some of these recommendations by the MOD, the single Services and the Service Complaints Transformation Team. However, the pace has been slower than the Ombudsman envisaged. There are still 11 recommendations outstanding and some that were not adopted, which the Ombudsman feels need to be reassessed.

The Ombudsman will continue to report against these recommendations until they have been completed.

## Observations

This year, the Ombudsman has chosen to make observations relating to wider issues or points highlighted by SCOAF and the Service Complaints system throughout 2020. These issues are not sufficiently urgent to require recommendations being made. However, they do present further opportunities for learning and development.





**Observation 1:** The Services should make better use of the wider learning points made in SCOAF's investigation reports to ensure some of the basic errors in complaint handling are removed.

**Observation 2:** Where possible, the Services and SCOAF should review how case files are processed and handled, looking for ways to utilise technology and reduce reliance on paper to facilitate remote and flexible working.

**Observation 3:** The pandemic restricted the Ombudsman's ability to undertake face to face presentations which underpin the outreach programme and aids learning. SCOAF should ensure educational material about the role and powers of the Ombudsman is accessible online and prepare for the move to virtual presentations.

## About the Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces (SCOAF)

SCOAF provides independent and impartial oversight of the Service Complaints system. The primary way in which she does this is through her powers of referral and investigation. Using these powers the Ombudsman can:

	Help Service personnel access the Service Complaints system by making <b>referrals</b> for individuals who don't want to approach their chain of command directly to make their complaint.
	Review <b>admissibility decisions</b> made by the chain of command and determine whether a complaint or appeal was correctly excluded.
	Investigate <b>undue delay</b> in the handling of a Service Complaint or Service Matter.
	Investigate the <b>substance (merits)</b> and/or handling of a complaint ( <b>maladministration</b> ) once the internal Service Complaints process is complete.

## Contacts

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